Backyard Blitz

Inner City Slick

The Backyard Blitz team turned an overgrown backyard into an inspirational garden in just one weekend.

The plan was to create a functional and attractive backyard that looked great all year round. Landscape designer Colin Brown drew up a plan which included decomposed granite and sleeper paving, bold new fences and clever use of screening plants.

Materials

Fences: all treated pine: fence posts (3m with mortices pre-cut); rails (5.4m); cover strips (1.8m); capping (1m); Hardiflex sheets (1200x1800x4.5mm); paint - Dulux 'Rich Plum' acrylic low sheen.

Paving: decomposed granite (brown); off-white cement. Sleeper paving: river sand; treated pine sleepers (2400x150x75mm) and pegs (600mm).

Shade sail: trisail with stays, treated pine post and cross beams.

Garden: treated pine sleepers and Y12 steel rods for bed construction; plants (see plan); organic garden mix; lucerne chaff mulch.

Extras: galvanised nails and gang nails are used to secure the sleepers and Rapidset cement (40kg bags) is used for setting all poles and posts.

Adapting this plan to your garden

Make a detailed scale drawing of your backyard (eg 1:100) showing the location of the house and major features then incorporate the desired elements from our makeover. As your garden will be a different size you will need to estimate the amounts of materials you will require.

Note: On your plan show the locations of any services (water pipes, sewerage, power, phone, etc) so you can avoid damaging them during the makeover.

Permits and approval - council permission is required to remove trees, and may be required for some structural work. Neighbours need to be consulted about new boundary fences. If they don't agree with your proposed fencing idea, you are legally entitled to build your new fence on your own property - eg just on your side of the boundary line.

Step-by-step

Getting started: The rubbish, old structures and concrete paths were removed and the site rotary hoed to remove weeds and get it level. As a backdrop for the new-look garden, we gave the back of the house a fresh coat of paint (Dulux Colourbond 'Ironbark' acrylic low sheen, trim highlighted in 'Dark Plum').

The fence: New fences were built using large Hardiflex sheets painted plum pink. Here's how we erected the fence:

Step 1 Before construction, paint the posts, cross rails, cover strips, capping and Hardiflex sheets.

Step 2 Mark out the position of the end posts and use an auger or shovel to dig the post holes to 600mm deep.

Step 3 Place the post in the hole. Use a spirit level to ensure the post is exactly vertical. Half fill the hole with water then tip a bag of Rapidset cement into the hole, watering as you go. The cement should be filled to the top of the hole. Hold the post in position while the cement starts to set (about 4 minutes).

Step 4 Once the end posts are in position run 2 string lines between them (one just above ground level, the second along the top) to find the side and top level for the intermediate posts. Follow steps 2-3 above to put these posts in place.

Step 5 Allow the concrete to set before continuing. If using a nail gun, allow concrete to set for at least three hours. If using a normal hammer, wait at least three days.

Step 6 Mitre cut adjoining ends of the cross rails at 22° for a flush fit. Attach the cross rails to the posts through the morticed holes and nail through the fence post to secure.

Step 7 Nail the Hardiflex sheets to the cross rails. Use cover strips to cover the joins between each board. Attach the capping along the top. Tip: Use galvanised nails only for treated pine and for a long-lasting job and to prevent rust staining.

Garden beds:

a 200mm high garden bed was built from treated pine sleepers along one fence.

Step 1 Mark out the corners of the beds and run string lines between them. Use the string line as a guide to place the sleepers.

Step 2 To form a footing for the sleepers, dig a shallow (100mm) trench under the string line and compact it. Place a 25mm layer of river sand in the base of the trench.

Step 3 Place a row of sleepers in the trench. To make sure each one is flush with the next tap it with a lump hammer. This method can also be followed as a garden edging.

Step 4 Secure the sleepers with steel pegs. To make the pegs cut a Y12 steel rod into 1m lengths.

Drill holes through each sleeper at 600mm intervals and drive each peg through a hole and into the ground until it's flush with the top of the sleeper.

Step 5 Nail each sleeper to the next using 150mm galvanised nails. Nail a galvanised gang nail plate on the inner edge of the join.

Step 6 For the raised garden bed (three sleepers high) first lay the bottom sleepers in the manner described above. When laying the next two rows make sure the joints are staggered. Use 150mm nails and gang nail plates to secure each sleeper to the adjacent sleeper and the one below. Fill the bed with a good quality organic garden mix (or better still, excavate soil from somewhere else in your yard) ready for planting.

Paving and lawns:

The utility area was paved with decomposed granite. Three areas of wooden paving were laid using lengths of treated pine. Some lawn was also included. To reduce maintenance a 'no mow' zoysia turf was used. Tip: Measure the area to be turfed and take those measurements to your turf supplier to estimate the amount of turf you need. As a rule of thumb order an extra 5-10%.

To prepare for all paving rake to level the area then use a vibrating plate to compact the ground until it is solid.

To lay the decomposed granite:

Step 1 Spread a 100mm layer of decomposed granite over the entire area.

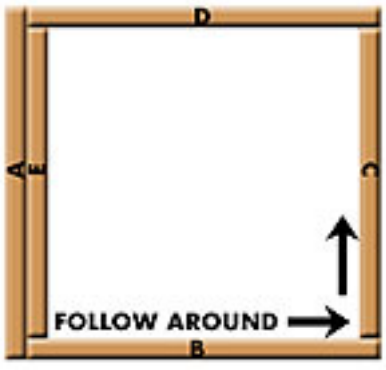
Step 2 Generously sprinkle off-white cement over the granite and lightly rake it in.

Step 3 Compact the granite with a vibrating plate to a finished depth of 75mm. Tip: if the granite is dry sprinkle with water before you compact it.

To lay the treated timber:

Measure the area where the sleepers will be laid and cover prepared soil with a 50mm layer of sand. ***Tip:*** To enhance the spiral pattern chamfer the top edges of the sleepers with a plane.

Step 1 Create a frame by laying out 4 sleepers (A, B, C, D in the diagram). All corners should be 90°. Hint: Make the area a sleeper length (or a multiple) to reduce cutting. The square pattern shown is 2.55m square, or the length of a sleeper + the width of the next.



Step 2 Drive treated pine pegs at 500mm spaces along the outside edge of the framing sleepers and nail to the sleepers.

Step 3 Nail the framing sleepers to each other using 150mm galvanised nails and galvanised gang nail plates.

Step 4 Begin internal construction. To create a spiral effect, lay the first sleeper along the right side

(point E on the diagram) and continue working in an anticlockwise direction. Note: No two pieces of sleeper will be the same length as the square is getting smaller (each piece is the width of a sleeper shorter than the one before it). Measure and cut one piece of sleeper at a time. If the last space is too narrow for a full sleeper, cut it to fit.

Step 5 Each sleeper must fit tightly. Gently tap the sides of each sleeper with a lump hammer to ensure it is hard up against the one outside it.

Step 6 Finally, compact the finished paving with a vibrating plate taking care to ensure it is even. Hint: bring lawn level up to match paving.

The shade sail:

An old yacht sail was used for shade. It was adapted by a sailmaker to be fully retractable and came complete with all necessary stays. As a guide, our trisail was 5x6m. The base (wide end) was attached to a beam on the house under the eaves and the other to a post (minimum post dimensions 90x90mm, we used 3.6m high treated pine). The distance of the post from the house depends on the length of the sail. For stability, position the post on a 45° angle to the house. Set the post into a 1m deep hole with at least 2 bags of Rapidset cement (follow step 3 under 'The fence' above).

To attach the sail:

Step 1 Dynabolt a treated pine beam to an external wall. Staple the wide end of the sail to the beam. The stays are tied to eye bolts inserted into the beam.

Step 2 Using galvanised bolts attach a cross beam to the top of the pole. Insert eye bolts to secure the stays from the sail.

Planting out:

the new garden bed was filled with an organic garden mix and planted according to the plan. When planting make sure the plants are at the same depth in the soil that they were in pot. After planting the garden was mulched with lucerne to a depth of 50mm. Tip: Water plants in well after planting.

Our plants: Cupressus torulosa, Lomandra longifolia, hydrangea (dwarf blue), 'no mow' turf (Zoysia), assorted culinary herbs (need full sun).

Cupressus torulosa

Cost and availability:

We used mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect for television. Our total cost was $6110.00. Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants ($4279.00). Plants are readily available at nurseries (for turf suppliers look under 'Lawn and Turf Supplies' in the Yellow Pages). Most other materials are available from large hardware stores and landscape suppliers. Sails are available from sailmakers (listed in the Yellow Pages). The rotary hoe and vibrating plate are available for hire.

Acknowledgements:

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